

Marketing Materials Analysis

Marketing Materials Evaluation Summary

Overall, the marketing materials for Fredericksburg Area Tourism (FAT) are either on par or better than the materials we see in other destination marketing organizations (DMOs).

Based on the response to our research, the conversion rate of the FAT materials is at 28%. While this rate is below the average DMO conversion, which is 35-40%, the low result may have been impacted by the newness of the campaign and timing of this report. Respondents may not have had enough time between the mailings and inquiry to plan a trip. When asked whether they were planning a trip to the area in the next year, 70.5% said yes. This response leads us to believe that the conversion rate will increase over the next year.

However, one must remember that as an industry we have trained the tourist to expect a certain style and level of effective materials. This does not mean that they are the best they can be. When compared to other materials that do offer great user-friendliness, the same tourist who rates materials for a particular destination highly, will choose another destination because their materials are more effective. Thus, RTM recommends that the materials for FAT be enhanced for even greater effectiveness. Think of this as adding a little more “sizzle” to a good, quality steak.

For overall enhancement we recommend future designs and formatting that focus on the following:

- Establishing a visitor “hook” on the front of each piece. This is the positioning and includes wording and design presented in such a way as to compel potential visitors to want to come to the area. The positioning theme should be incorporated on all materials – including the press kit and website.
- Designing each piece in terms of “user-friendliness” for the customer.
- Using itineraries and trip planning in all materials to make choosing the Fredericksburg area an easier decision for potential visitors.

The specific pieces we reviewed and our commentary on each follows:

1. Fredericksburg Spotsylvania Stafford Visitor Guide:

Based on our research, the Fredericksburg Spotsylvania Stafford Visitor Guide ranks 3rd as a source of information on the area and was rated highly by the visitors contacted for this study. This is impressive since this Visitor Guide has not been available for an extended number of years. The visitor guide includes a complete list of all the area attractions, lodging, restaurants, events and outdoor activities. While the format and information is good, there are a few changes that will improve the overall effectiveness of the piece.

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Cover

The front cover of the guide simply lists the three jurisdictions with photos focusing mainly on the civil war. It does not introduce for the visitor a clear and enticing reason to visit. Words, photographs and the guide design should immediately place the reader “in the scene.” This combination of images should instantly convey the experience that awaits them.

Inside Cover

Upon opening the visitor guide, the visitor is given information on the most popular draw to the area - the Civil War. While this copy is very informative, it does not provide the visitor with a clear hook - a quick list of the area’s “attractors.” Such a list would engage the visitor giving them an instant idea of the experience the area has to offer. After identifying the “must sees”, providing a list of 1, 2 and 3-day itineraries will help the visitor plan their trip. The long narrative found on this page should be placed later in the visitor guide after you have hooked the reader and gained their interest to read on. Too many words at the beginning of the visitor guide can bore the reader and they won’t read on.

It is very effective to have the fold out map on the inside front cover. Bravo! This layout makes the map easy to reference when reading the listings found in the remainder of the visitor guide. Use unique shaped icons on this map to show the attractors and how their locations relate to lodging, shopping and dining. These are the critical elements that help the reader decide what to do, where to stay and where to eat and where to shop.

Attractions

The guide’s listing of attractions is very thorough and includes all the relevant information – including website addresses where available. However it makes the number one mistake of all tourism brochures – the politically correct alphabetical listing. While the alphabetical listing makes an easy decision when deciding which attraction gets listed first, it disappoints the reader who is looking for a reason to visit. The cover and inside cover of this visitor guide feature the Civil War, which would compel the reader to plan a Civil War oriented visit. But the first page of attractions reveals Belmont and Gari Melchers. This confuses the reader who asks himself, “Where is the Civil War stuff?”

Overall, the amount of information provided in the attractions section is very helpful and presented in a clear and orderly fashion. The photography used throughout the guide is beautiful and does a wonderful job of painting the experience for the visitor. Our primary recommendations in regard to the listings is to change the order of the attractions listed and use the priority revealed by the chart in the research found in Section 6, question 16. Those attractions most visited should be listed first as the “Must-sees” in the area.

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Also the background layout of the listings should be consistent so as not to confuse the reader. For example, pages 4 and 5 look so different it is hard to make a visual connection that the attractions section continues onto page 5. Additionally, the page numbers throughout are difficult to read. The star competes with the number.

Dining Out / Lodging

Remember that a typical travel planner comes to the area to go to an attraction or attractions then selects their lodging and finally the dining and shopping. Therefore a logical sequence should follow in the visitor guide. After attractions put the lodging and show how the lodging relates to the attraction locations. Convenience is important to most travel planners.

We like the way the dining and lodging are grouped by exit, but again proximity to one another is important to the travel planner. A map with unique icons for each can help solve this problem. While this seems tedious in the planning stage, the extra effort will be rewarded with increased visitation. If you make it easy for the planner to put all the elements of the trip together you have a much better chance of converting them to an overnight visit. In some places the current subhead typeface is very difficult to read, especially the red type on a green background - pgs 24, 27, 28. Consistency of backgrounds is important and be careful that a bold design doesn't interfere with the basic information delivery.

Camping / Golfing / Family Fun / Rainy Days / Exploring

This is all very good information and should be included in the attractions. When we were doing reconnaissance in the area we missed all of this in our first planning stage because we didn't notice it in the back of the visitor guide. Include it all in or after the attractions and then change the "exploring" and "Family Fun" sections to "Itineraries". Our research in other areas has shown that readers respond to the word "itinerary" as meaning simplified planning!

2000 Events

There is way too much here. Narrow this down to the five or ten major events that will compel visitation and mention that a complete and detailed listing of hundreds of events can be found on the website.

Overall

It is a very good visitor guide. Some changes in format will make it have better appeal in the rack and be a better planning tool for the reader.

Additional recommendations for visitor guide improvement can be found in Section 9 – Marketing Strategies”.

2. Group Tour Guide

As with the Visitor Guide, this is a good piece and offers quality information. The introduction is great. For the typical “speed reading” tour planner, this gives a very good and quick overview that offers great appeal. The list of attractions and itineraries are well complemented by the attraction and accommodation charts, which assists the planner in coordinating lodging and dining plans. Just as in the visitor guide, this piece must make it easy for the planner to put it all together. While a group tour planner is more experienced in reading these guides and knows what they are looking for, it must be noted that they have much less patience. If it is not easy...they will throw it away!

Our main concern for this piece is the engagement factor. The front cover, like the Visitor Guide, only lists the three areas (script type is very hard to read) with small photographs. We suggest you revise the cover design based on recommendations outlined for the Visitor Guide. Specifically, incorporate the positioning along with images that “hook” the viewer and give them a taste of the experience. While the introduction on the first page of the guide does a very good job of providing an overview, you may want to add “attractors” to the photo list along the side bar. We also recommend adding a table of contents to the inside front cover. Most of all don’t let the design overpower the basic information provided.

3. Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania Civil War Battlefields Brochure

Part of Virginia’s Grant vs. Lee Driving Tour marking the trail of Grant’s Overland Campaign through the state, this brochure provides location maps and a quick overview of the four main battles fought in the Fredericksburg area during the Civil War. The overview found on the inside double spread is a lot of small black typeface on a white background. This means the reader finds it boring. The same information could be redesigned with bold typeface used to draw the reader to the “good stuff”. The copy must compel the reader to read on and simple cues in the typeface could make this much more interesting.

The inside four panel layout provides the layout and maps needed to visit any of the sites, but could use details such as hours of operation, fees, parking, time allowed for a visit, etc.

A little more “sizzle” on the front cover and inside front page to really engage the visitor would improve this brochures effectiveness. Whether this format was dictated by the state will have an effect on the amount of change that can be made to the piece. In our reconnaissance we noticed that a large number of travelers were carrying this brochure with them while visiting the area.

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4. Fredericksburg Press Kit

In reviewing the Fredericksburg press kit, we found the following:

Folder

The press kit pocket folder is a white, un-coated paper stock featuring Fredericksburg in script type printed over an ornamental gate piece on the front cover. The folder does not match the look of the FAT Visitor Guide or Tour Group Planner. All materials for the area should correspond in message and design.

Inside Materials

Inside the press kit, we found brochures, brochures and more brochures. The materials covered every attraction, restaurant, lodging facility and even the local demographic information of Fredericksburg. What we did NOT find was a media angles listing, fact sheet, a press release or any media related information. While these printed pieces are informative, they do not provide the travel writers with any “news worthy” information. Writers quickly scan through materials, and if an idea does not catch their attention, they generally either discard or simply file away the kit.

In numerous interviews with travel writers and editors they tell us that what they prefer be included in a press kit (in rank order) are:

- **Gimmicks**: Writers and editors are consumers too. Why should they notice your materials when they are swamped with other competing information? They don’t want to be “bought” – but they do notice and respond to items that typify your destination and are unique and fun.
- **Media Angles Listing**: The first thing a writer should see inside the Press Kit is a clean list of story ideas that offers simple descriptions of possible unique story angles. Back-up releases could be included also.
- **Fact Sheet**: A simple fact sheet with all the pertinent information about the area that is easy to use.
- **Press Releases**: Highlighting a specific event, new attraction or updated attraction that would interest new and old visitors alike.
- **Brochures**: They want your standard brochures, with all the information outlined just the way a tourist wants the information. In other words, use good positioning on the front, tell them the “must sees,” suggest itineraries, and give the appropriate listings of attractions, lodging, dining, shopping, and other amenities. And if one or two of the brochures cover 98% of the attractions, then do not duplicate by including every other possible brochure. Less is more!
- **A Really Good Map**: An “idiot-proof” map is what they need to supply to their readers. Providing this in the kit gets notice.

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- Appropriate visual or audio items: This would include slides, black and white photos for newspapers, background sound audio for radio, and B-roll footage for video.
- PSAs: Public Service Announcements are also appreciated in the format needed by the individual media. This might include print versions, and audio/video options for 10, 15, 30 and 60-second versions.

5. Web-site

This section offers a critique of the websites found promoting the Fredericksburg area using basic Internet search engines. It is understood that FAT is currently undertaking the creation of a comprehensive web site promoting the region. Currently, The Fredericksburg web site is the most comprehensive site that we uncovered.

Our critique of the City of Fredericksburg website is current as of December 6, 2000, the most recent date that we logged on to the site. This is an important distinction because websites must be updated continuously to be current for the inquiring visitor. It must also be noted that recent regional and national research has indicated that travelers are flocking to the web for travel planning at record numbers. This trend is certain to continue and the website will soon replace the visitor guide as the number one marketing tool for DMOs. It must be noted that the current website is being redesigned so this section of the report will provide basic recommendations.

The research in this report shows that the web is the second most utilized information source among those planning a trip to the area. Therefore, the new site must be the first and primary focus of future marketing efforts.

Keywords:

The best site in the world is ineffective if the web surfer can't find it. Make sure that all possible keywords are registered with the search engines. Include common misspellings of town and attraction names so poor spellers can find you too. Our search for the site using various search engines did not produce the site address in the first 15 listings. Your new site should be registered more effectively with search engines and be monitored continuously. Search for your own site regularly to make sure that common misspellings still lead the web surfer to your site.

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Home Page:

The current Fredericksburg home page presents a common image – the historical sketch of the town - used in many of your other existing marketing materials. The imagery of the new web site should match the new positioning and design recommended for the FAT marketing materials. Once you click through to the main home page, you present a mostly static screen that doesn't do much to entice the viewer. The only interactivity is a gold bar that lists famous historical figures. It would be much more interesting if you could click on the bar and go to related attractions. Just watching the names change doesn't bring any value to the site. Interactivity in a web site is important, as consumer research has shown that a static web site has little appeal.

There is concern as to why you have two menu listings on the home page –along the top and left side of the page. We recommend consolidating to one menu selection – preferably the top list of options. In addition, the search menus along the right side of the screen require the visitor to wade through too many levels before finding information. Simplifying this process would be more effective.

Most of the icons along the far-left side of the home page (and other section pages throughout the site) are helpful and effective.

- The Visitor Center click through is good, though a location map here would be helpful. The Hospitality Pass information is buried on the Visitor Center page. You should create a specific icon or selection option for this and feature it in a few other places on the site – the attraction, tour and travel package pages.
- The Fall/Weekend Getaway icon should be a page listing weekend packages (accommodations, itineraries, etc.) It should not be another site with a different look and the same information as the main site. The idea of a special icon to indicate deals or a special package is great – use it.
- The Golf Guide is very well done – clear, helpful with all the pertinent information listed, including a 1-800 number.
- The Maps are good, except for the script type, which is hard to read. The new web site should include a map of the East Coast that includes driving mileages from major points.

Tours:

This section provides information for each of the tour options, but fails to engage the viewer and convey the experience that awaits them. A lot could be done to enhance this section, including adding photography and more descriptive copy about the experience. Also, be sure to include all information. A number of the tours did not list the itinerary or cost.

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Events Calendar:

Many sites forget this important piece of information. The listing is long and thorough but doesn't offer compelling information to sell each event. It's a list. What are the top three to five events each year? Which ones are "must sees"? The biggest challenge here is to keep the information current and updated (critical).

- Put the "Don't Miss" events at the top
- Include thumbnails to click and see pictures
- Include links where they are available
- Add and encourage lodging packages

Restaurants:

All travelers eat; in fact they eat more when traveling than when they are at home. So show them what is unique about dining in the region. The current listing reads as a list and doesn't visually compel the reader to "come and eat". Put the reader visually and verbally in the experience!

- Put the "unique local dining experiences" at the top and include photos and compelling descriptions. Make those mouths water!
- The unique experiences will get the web site visitor to convert to a customer who will still eat at plenty of other local eateries. Promote that which will COMPEL a visit!

Lodging:

Once people decide to visit based on the attractions, they look for lodging. We like the fact that the accommodations section allows you to search by type of lodging property desired. Unfortunately what you find is a rather dull listing of information. This could look much better with some pictures of each lodging property. A few points:

- Can the AAA logo be added to the rating? This is very compelling for many travelers, especially the age groups identified in the research.
- Including the links to the individual lodging property web sites where available is very good and few DMO websites have accomplished this step.
- Including meeting and banquet room information is also very helpful.
- Lack of photography prevents the reader from seeing what the lodging looks like. Encourage the lodging properties to provide photos.
- The long-term goal should be to facilitate reservations at this site. A one-stop vacation planning service. We know this is a political "hot-potato", but the customer wants speed and simplicity – that's why they book ocean cruises. Forge ahead in the pursuit of "click here to make a reservation."

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Shopping:

The research identified shopping as very popular among visitors but not a big driver of spending. Few, if any, website visitors will take time to contact another agency for information. Shopping can be the number one source of traveler spending in the area if you take this space and sell it. A few changes here will change this trend:

- Feature the “Unique Shops” that appeal to tourists
- Photos and descriptions will put the reader in the unique shops and increase the desire to visit.

Places to See:

People come to an area to see or do something so this section must be the most compelling and interactive. Using the research to identify the most popular activities for the traveling public, feature those activities and in great detail. Make it a virtual visit. Use ample pictures and any copy should have a “you are there” style that puts the reader in the experience. Some points of interest:

- Put a list of five “Don’t miss these” at the top of the page (the research identifies these for you).
- The long list of names without pictures is boring and unappealing. Not many people will take the time to click on each and read about them all. Provide pictures of each then click for detail.
- The links in the attractions listings are good.
- “Click to enlarge photo” should be added.
- Be sure that all hours of operation, admission fees, etc., are current. Also be sure to include phone numbers and driving directions.

Travel Packages:

Your travel packages section offers a nice group of options, ranging from the Civil War attractions to golf to romantic getaways. The copy on the Civil War package page fails to engage the visitor. Create more of a hook – give them a reason to consider one of the packages. It would also be helpful to develop more of an all-inclusive package – not just a reduced room rate. Include a range of package prices that include the attraction admission fees and maybe dinner or breakfast at the hotel or Inn. The links to the attraction descriptions on the itinerary page are helpful and would be even better if photos were included. We also recommend adding more options under the shopping and romantic getaway packages – as you only have one for each.

Tour Groups:

The tour group information is very thorough and provides a planner with everything they need to plan a trip to the Fredericksburg area. A few recommendations:

- Add Lura’s phone number to the main tour group page.
- Add the “Top Ten Group Activities”.
- Add the most popular group itinerary.

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6. Advertising Placement Analysis

The research team reviewed the F.A.T. advertising print placement for 1998 and 1999. Based on our research, your main target audience consists of retirees and middle age (average age 51) homemakers, 63% are female. The majority of your visitors (80%) drive to visit the Fredericksburg area from the following top 7 markets: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, California and Michigan.

The responses to the lodging survey show that you draw visitors from the following states in rank order: New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, Florida and New Jersey.

Armed with this information, the data found in Section 7, question #7 and the cost per lead of your previous plans, we have the following comments on your print placement selections.

Publications to continue:

- *AAA Tour Guide* – This was the #1 source of information listed by visitors contacted for our research study. While it is on the high end as far as cost per lead, it is a critical component to your plan.
- *Reader's Digest* – The older end of your target audience is a large part of this publication's circulation. With the low cost per lead, we recommend you continue placing in the "Getting Away" and "Virginia" sections.
- *Better Homes and Gardens, Country Home, Family Circle and Ladies Home Journal* – These lifestyle magazines were huge successes based on cost per lead and are very popular books for your target audience.
- *Pittsburgh Magazine & Washingtonian* – While you do not have cost per lead information for either of these publications, the editorial content of each and their reach into two of your top 5 feeder markets make both publications good selections to continue.
- *Civil War Times and Guide to VA's Civil War* – Increasing the number of insertions and moving them to the first quarter of the year improved your response rate.
- *Southeast Tourism Society, STS and USA Weekend*
- *Golf Digest and/or Golf Magazine* – We suggest lowering your overall expenditure for the golf publications. While it is important to have a presence, you must receive the best return for your investment.

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Publications to reconsider:

- *Southern Living* – This is a very expensive placement and the research shows the majority of your travelers are coming down I-95 to find you. Many of the publications listed above will reach into your southern market appropriately. If the outreach budget is increased you may want to go back into Southern Living.
- *Yankee* – This was a rather large investment with a low return. Are you reaching the same audience with a different publication?
- *The Toronto Star Golf Guide*
- *Mature Outlook and New Choices* – *these may overlap with audiences you are already reaching.*

A simple conversion study should be conducted every year to determine the ranking and effectiveness of all advertising vehicles. Future F.A.T. budgets should show increased expenditures in ad placement.